

# Social Media for Babies?

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## ABSTRACT

This proposed study aims to examine the phenomena of parents who preemptively create and manage social media accounts for their young children who are not yet able to use or manage these accounts themselves. The reasons and motivations cited by parents may vary, from wanting to create a personal identity separate from their children, to wanting to reserve a social media handle for their child's name. This proposal examines the communicative, cultural, and social contexts that may lead parents to this decision, while acknowledging the benefits and risks associated with families' use of social media. It reviews literature on the management of children's online identities, parental control, children's privacy rights and public autonomy, and permission issues, and considers possible tensions that may arise between parents and children as an intergenerational dynamic when disclosing personal information online. As social media's aptitude as a culture-shifting communication tool continues to expand, so does its potential for intergenerational impact on parents and their children. As its use becomes more common among all stages of the lifespan, it will become vital to policy makers and web developers to understand the long-term impact of these early-aged accounts.

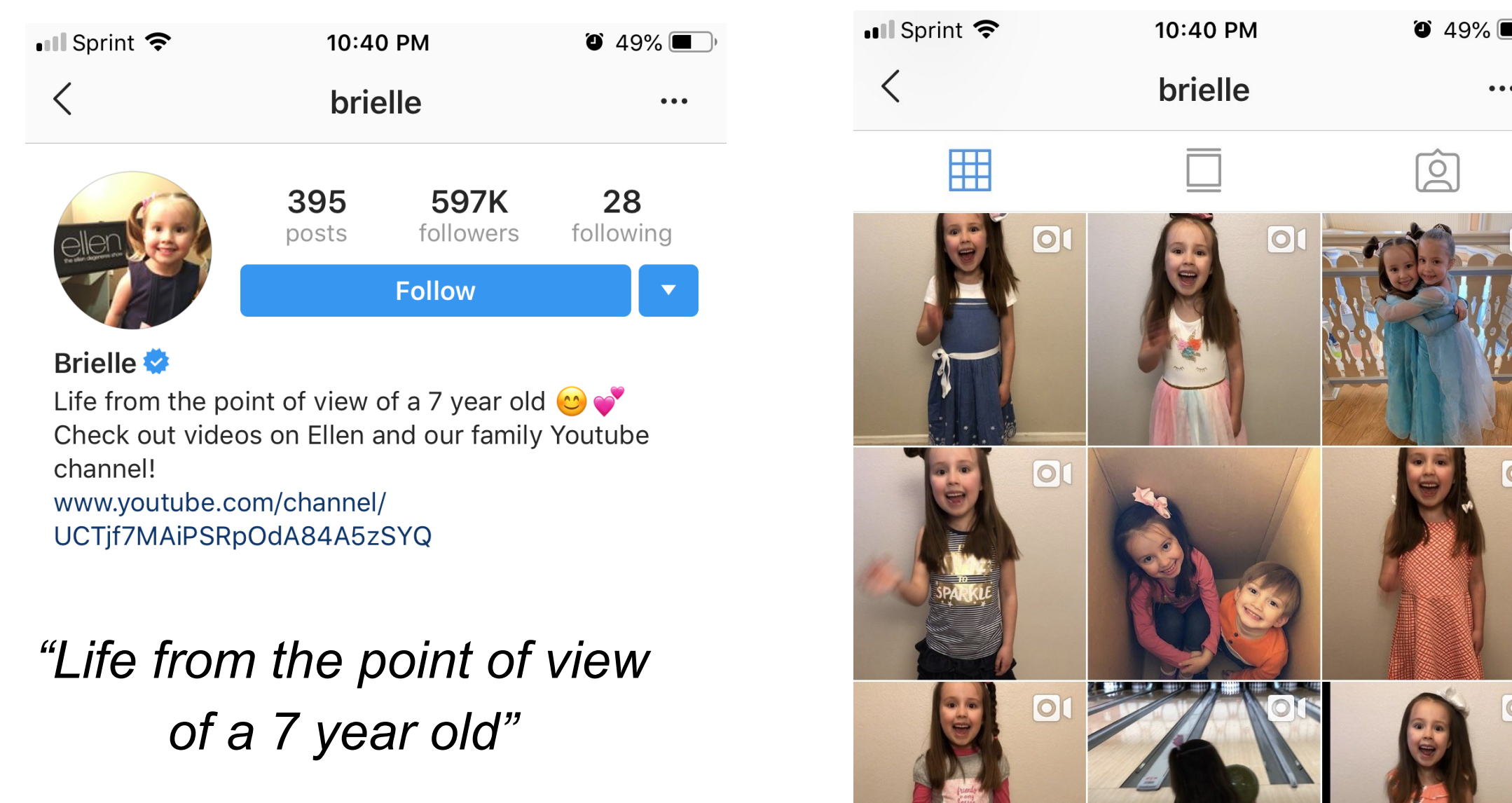
## BACKGROUND

- Parents face a significant and time-intensive responsibility of deciding how to balance their desire to post content about their children with the implications for their children's future digital identities (Ammari, Kumar, Lampe, and Schoenebeck, 2015).
- Parents are endowed with certain rights and responsibilities to make decisions on their child's behalf, which may phase out gradually over time as the child matures, so their ownership of their child's information slowly transfers to the child over the lifespan. This could lead to conflict if, when the child assumes management of their online identity, their privacy desires are in disagreement with what parents have already disclosed about them.
- When posting about their children on social media, parents reported that they ask for their children's permission less often than they believe they should" (Moser, Chen, & Schoenebeck, 2017).
- There is not yet any information about the effects of a parent-managed public online identity for kids as they grow up and begin to manage their own identities.

**~40%** of moms aged 18-34 created social media accounts for their baby before the child's first birthday

### CASE EXAMPLE:

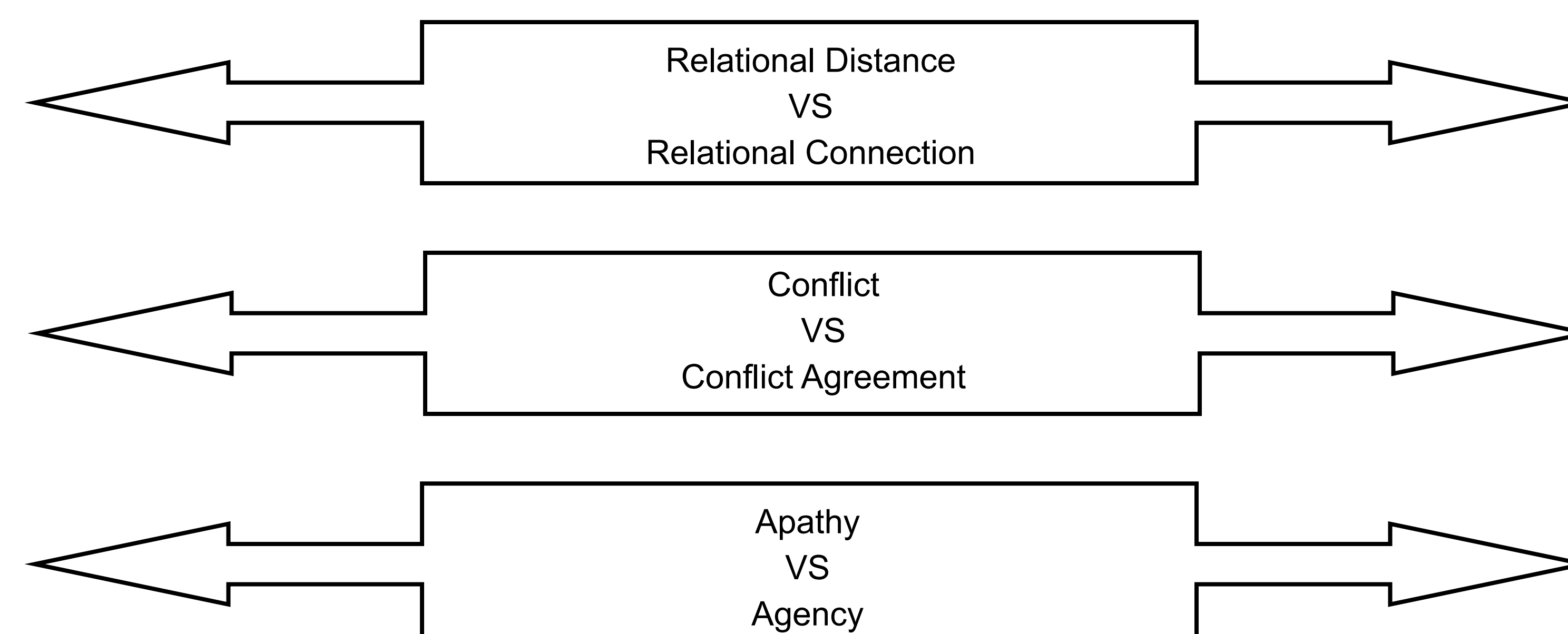
Brielle Mila (@brielle)



*"Life from the point of view of a 7 year old"*

*"Every person has a right to decide how they're presented online... the most valuable gift a parent can give their kid is not a reserved Twitter handle or a decade of precious #memories, but a blank slate on which to create their own online identity" — Amber Macarthur*

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS



## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

This study proposes a longitudinal study to determine the long-term effects on the parent-child relationship, and especially on the children who will have grown up with a public online accounting of their life from a very young age.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- *RQ1: How do parents and children negotiate conflicts in identity about what is shared online, and how does this evolve as the children mature?*
- *RQ2: How does parents' crafting of their child's online persona affect the parent-child relational dynamic, and how might this change over time as the relationship matures?*
- *RQ3: How does having a publicly documented identity from a very young age affect children at various stages in the lifespan?*

## METHODOLOGY

- 16-year longitudinal, qualitative study on children and their parents living in the United States.
- Locate 80 parent-child dyads who fit the criteria of having parent-managed social media accounts for their children starting from infancy to preschool age (0 to 5 years), and conduct interviews with both the parents and the children at three intervals, which are determined based on Erikson's Developmental Life Stages.
- There will be one in the beginning when the child is Preschool aged (3 to 5 years), one in the middle when the child enters Adolescence (12 to 14 years), and one at the end when the child enters Young Adulthood (19 years).
- At the end of the study, we will perform a thematic content analysis to determine the long-term effects of parent-managed social media accounts for young children, and to understand how perceptions of the accounts differ according to the age and maturity of the children.
- The content analysis will also consider how relational dynamics between parents and children evolve while management of the child's online identity is involved.



